

Just Preaching ... in Times of Transition

South African Perspectives¹

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Abstract

In this paper, a brief overview is given of two research projects that were done in South Africa during 1987 (a particularly difficult time under apartheid), and 1994 (the year that the first democratic elections took place), respectively. Some of the findings are discussed under the keywords: silence, transition, reservation, new vision. Reference is made to a historic sermon preached by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town only three days before the first democratic elections were held in South Africa on the 27th of April, 1994. The paper concludes with a reflection on an artwork by the South African artist, Willie Bester.

1. Just Preaching?

The well-known American homiletician, Fred Craddock, who has been called the father of inductive preaching,² tells the story of a preacher who, in familiar tradition, stood at the front door of the church building after the service, shaking the parishioners' hands as they were leaving the building. As per custom, many parishioners uttered some trivial comments about the sermon, e.g. "Good sermon, reverend!"; "Thank you for your moving words"; etc. Then one particular man, looking distraught, took the preacher's hands and said in a stern voice: "This changes everything."

The preacher was taken aback, not knowing what to think of this comment. "What do you mean?" he asked. The man replied:

"What you said in the sermon ... If it's true what you said, it changes everything ... What I mean is that, well, none of us here can just go home and do what we thought we were going to do this afternoon. We're not here just for that ... for the lawn mowing or the 4:00 football game. Our world is not right ... Preacher, *you're right*. We are called to put in

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² Inductive preaching is seen as the forerunner to the so-called "New Homiletics". For a good overview of the "New Homiletics", see *Charles Campbell*, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology*, Grand Rapids 1997, 134–144; 156ff.; also *David Reid/Stephen Bullock/Jeffrey Flier*, *Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic*, in: *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 1995/Vol. 18, 1, 1–9.



place here and now God's reign and God's care for the planet and for every person.

Everything has changed."

The preacher was shook up by this utterance, and blurted out without realizing what he was saying: "Now Jim, don't get so worked up. I was *just preaching*."³

Just preaching. On a certain level, many sermons could indeed be described in this manner: a minister going through the motions of a (sometimes tedious) ecclesial ritual, often without expecting much in terms of an (ethical) outcome. In particular, not expecting any meaningful action or ground-breaking impulse towards the upholding or restoration of societal justice in and through this act of just preaching. Just preaching can in fact be thoroughly without justice, completely justice-less.

But what do we then mean by "just preaching" or "preaching justice"? Obviously there are many ways to describe this. For the sake of this paper, I restrict myself to three keywords, used by Walter Brueggemann, when he talks about the role of the Old Testament prophets in their passion for justice, namely; *judgement*, *pathos*, and *new beginnings*. Brueggemann uses these terms against the backdrop of the experience of exile in Israel, a state of transition in which the plight of the marginalized in Israel was often only articulated by the prophets, while issues like displacement and loss were not on the horizon of those in power. This experience of liminality, of being in-between, asked for a specific form of prophecy, namely one

"[...] that witness to the terrific loss that comes on the community, what in prophetic parlance is *judgment*, but judgment communicated with more sadness than rage [...] that testify to the *pathos* of God, to the pathologies of human community that contribute directly to God's own pain, a pain that reaches an extremity on the cross" [...] that find around the edges of failure *new beginnings*, new social possibilities that are given here and there in the midst of the deathliness as the prophets watch for and discern signs of newness."⁴

2. Silence ...

This witness of judgement, pathos, and new beginnings stands in stark contrast to the syndrome of less-than-just just preaching referred to above. A prime example of the latter can also be found

³ Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, ed. Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, St. Louis 2001, 52–53.

⁴ *Walter Brueggemann*, *Ancient Utterance and Contemporary Hearing, Just Preaching. Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, ed. André Resner, Jr., St. Louis, Missouri 2003, 74. Of course, liminality as such is also not a new concept. It had already been coined in 1909 by Arnold van Gennep, when he used the term *limen* (threshold, outlines, margins) to describe human rituals marking the passage from one life cycle to the other. Since then several other authors have made use of it, especially Victor Turner, who distinguishes between the phases of separation, liminality, and aggregation. He also made use of the idea of "pilgrimage" – which is essentially anti-structure and anti-status quo – but ultimately ends up with the formation of a new community ("communitas"), which can in turn become a new structure that eventually might need to be deconstructed. *Arnold van Gennep*, *Les rites de passage*, Paris 1909; *Victor Turner/Edith Turner*, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York 1978, 64.

in certain periods of South African history and within certain sectors of the South African context. I was part of a South African based Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) project, entitled: *An investigation into tendencies in South African religious broadcasts of the SABC and the hermeneutical and homiletical principles behind these broadcasts* (1987) that did extensive empirical research on sermons being broadcast during 1987. One of the findings was that a large part of the church – at least those that were in a position to broadcast their sermons – was silent during the time of apartheid. *Silence is a distinct form of unjust preaching*. It either expresses fear for the status quo, or acceptance thereof. It stabilizes and legitimizes the powers that be. It presupposes a certain ethical stance, which says: the status quo is good, or at least bearable – even if it is in reality inundated by injustices of all sorts.

The details of this period need not be repeated here; suffice to say that the country was balanced on a knife-edge, with a full scale civil war and unimaginable bloodshed a real possibility.⁵ The period from 1960 to the early 1990's was, on the one hand, characterized by post-war prosperity among a large part of the white population, and, on the other hand, by a growing relational problem and alienation among the various population groups. In this respect, the events at Sharpeville (1960) formed a type of watershed, and focused the world's attention on South Africa, with increasing foreign isolation, sanctions, and internal unrest and violence. South Africa's subsequent withdrawal from the Commonwealth (May 1961) caused its greatest economic crisis since the depression of 1930 to 1932. A combination of political, economic and social factors escalated into another watershed moment for South Africa, with the youth taking to the streets in the Soweto-uprising of 1976, resulting in a governmental clamp-down, called the "state of emergency." During this state of emergency, there were numerous violations of human rights, perpetuation of economic and social injustices, illegal detentions, etc.

So, how did preachers respond to this context of *structural injustice*? The research referred to above indicated that the religion that was then offered to ordinary, mainly Afrikaans-speaking people was almost always *imperative* in nature, but not as an appeal that affects daily and concrete reality. Rather, it was a type of alien-to-daily-life, non-existential appeal on the grounds of pietistic potential. The programmes' *contents* said virtually nothing about the issues that, for instance, received attention in the daily press. This interdisciplinary research, conducted in conjunction with the Departments of Sociology and Journalism at the University of Stellenbosch, found that *not one* of the ten most commented on issues of the day was reflected in the sermons that were broadcast.⁶

⁵ For an extensive discussion, cf. C.F.J. Müller (ed.), *Vyfhonderd jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, Kaapstad 1980, 510–520.

⁶ Cf. B.A. Müller, *An investigation into tendencies in South African religious broadcasts of the SABC and the hermeneutical and homiletical principles behind these broadcasts*, Stellenbosch 1987), 44–46. Allan Boesak, a well-known South African preacher articulates his aversion of pietistic traditions and preaching in the church in no unclear terms, stating that "this kind of theology is often the handmaid of authoritarian structures that preserve the status quo within the church, with the result that the church is being held back to an era that has irrevocable passed." For Boesak, the gospel – and preaching – is about *this* world, not an "other-worldly theology". *Allan Boesak, The Finger of God, Sermons on Faith and Responsibility*. Translated from Afrikaans by Peter

Socio-political issues like the following, received no, or very little attention in a total of 165 sermons and meditations preached on television and radio between April and November 1987:⁷

- Violence, including murder and crime: 0,06%
- Human Rights: 0,03%
- Detention and political trials: 0%
- Freedom of press: 0%
- Military violence, Governmental acts: 0%
- The Right to protest, protest actions: 0%
- Group Areas Act 0%
- Discrimination, e.g. in education, health services, wages, etc.: 0%
- Poverty, hunger, housing: 1,38%
- Joblessness: 0,03%
- Sexuality: 1%
- Drugs, alcoholism: 0,06%
- Ecological issues: 0%

This is truly remarkable; even more so, sad.⁸ Nothing to be said over the Group Areas Act in 1987, and the forceful removal of millions of people? Not a single word about discrimination? Not one sermon on poverty and hunger? Complete silence on justice? Simply... just preaching?⁹

The intensified political turmoil of the late eighties and early nineties eventually led to the release of Nelson Mandela, resulting in the first democratic general elections on 27 April 1994, which were described by many as “nothing short of a miracle.” Time and space constraints again do not allow me to describe the momentous events leading up to this breakthrough in detail.¹⁰ It

Randall, Johannesburg 1979, 4–5.

⁷ *Müller* (note 6), 10, 29.

⁸ Allan Boesak's words ring true: “[...] the silence that some want the church to maintain on these issues means that they are affirming the status quo.” *Boesak* (note 6), 11.

⁹ Of course, preachers like Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Beyers Naude and others were very vocal in their resistance to exactly these issues. Their voices were however not heard and in fact not allowed to be heard on the official broadcasting programmes, under strict control of the then National Party Government.

¹⁰ For an overview of this period, cf. *Herman Gilliomee/Bernard Mbenga* (Eds.), *New History of South Africa*, Kaapstad 2007, 330ff. Cf. also *Johan Cilliers*, *Prophetic preaching in South Africa: exploring some spaces of tension*, in: *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal*; NGTT .Volume 54 (1&2), 2013, 1–15.

was indeed a time of liminality, of transition, of being in-between the old and the new, a time filled with potential, but also the pitfalls of wrong decisions being made, and disastrous routes being taken.¹¹

The question of importance here is: How did preachers respond to the dawn of the “new South Africa” with its concomitant promises of “justice for all”? *If they were silent about injustice in the past, how would they speak about justice in the present?* Could any change in fact be detected in preaching in South Africa during this transition from socially structured injustice to socially structured justice?

3. Transition ...

I had the privilege of again being part of a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) project, working with a group of content analysts at the Faculty of Theology, The University of Stellenbosch that posed exactly these abovementioned questions during the year of our first democratic elections (1994). This project, again done as interdisciplinary research, conducted in conjunction with the Departments of Sociology and Journalism at the University of Stellenbosch, was entitled: *Preaching in contexts of change. An investigation into preaching on Radio South Africa, Afrikaans Stereo and Radio Pulpit before and after the general elections of 1994*. The selection of sermons was made from worship services being broadcast on the two Sundays before the election (27 April 1994) on Afrikaans Stereo, Radio South Africa and Radio Pulpit. This was followed by analyses of sermons broadcast one month and again three months after the election. In terms of content, we were especially interested in how people *thought and indeed spoke literally about the situation of change*.

The project did not claim that the selection was representative of all sermons during this time, merely that particular noteworthy trends could be identified. These trends were described by following literal pronouncements of preachers as closely as possible. Here are some of the findings:

3.1 Silence ... again.

There were a surprising number of sermons that completely circumvented the circumstances at the time – much like the sermons of 1987. In these sermons references were only made to general human problems like the pressure of competitiveness, tensions between parents and children etc. Biblical directives were given for various life problems, specific to the more affluent part of society, those who own swimming pools, sports cars and barbeque rooms! Apparently the sermons were

¹¹ Essentially liminality implies an ambiguous phase between two situations or statuses. Often this in-between space or liminal displacement is filled with potential and/or danger. It breathes “a sense of displacement, that sense of being in no man’s land, where the landscape appears completely different, there is no discernible road map, and where the journeyer is jolted out of normalcy”. *Arnie Franks/John Meteyard*, Liminality: The Transforming Grace of In-between Places, in: *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2007), 215–222. Characteristically the liminal phase is constituted by the convergence or interweaving of qualities of both categories between which it is sandwiched: “Since the liminal is neither fully one type of space (category) nor the other, it will take on aspects of both; it is this indeterminacy of quality and therefore predictability that creates the aspect of danger”. *Seth Daniel Kunin*, *God’s Place in the World. Sacred Space and Sacred Place in Judaism*, London/New York 1998, 30.

directed at people who were living spiritually isolated from what was happening in the country. In one sermon the preacher actually said: “As long as we enjoy life, everything is fine” – apparently a life without problems like unemployment, poverty etc. ...

The imperative in these kinds of sermons seems to be entirely in terms of the “spiritual” and personal aspects of life, admonishing people to come to a new spiritual approach. Such a changed spiritual approach could of course have had implications for the situation in the country – but the sermons did not address these implications in any way. It seems that the situation in the country was not really seen as a problem and definitely not as an emergency – the problems in life are viewed on a spiritual level for which the sermons offered Christ as the patent solution. Not a single word is uttered on issues like social and economic justice, and not a single confession of guilt in view of the past is heard.

The sphere in which these sermons operate remains the inner state of the religious hearer; the hermeneutical space remains reduced to the pious inner circle of the *homo religiosus*. The same pious material is used again and again, and ultimately, most of these sermons end up with “an invitation to invite Jesus into your lives.” This stereotypical pious encircling of biblical texts bypasses the reality outside the circle, in this case the reality of South Africa in a time of transition. The hearers find themselves in uncertain times, but they are not called to make decisions and act *within* this situation; they are rather *taken out* of this to a pious sphere where they must (for how many times still?) make a decision for God and to “invite Jesus into their lives.”¹²

3.2 In-between the Old and the New ...

The majority of the sermons were, however, delivered with the clear understanding that the church and society were experiencing a historically significant moment, were in fact standing at crossroads, in the in-between space of the “old” and the “new” South Africa. Many of the sermons presume that *ambivalent feelings* regarding this transition prevail in their audiences: from hopeful anticipation of a new dawn for which many sacrificed their lives to tension and uncertainty about the future; from anxiety about the demonic spiral of violence, to hope for a spiral of love and reconciliation. There is a focus on two worlds that interplay: the world in which God ultimately triumphs over demons, and the world of confusion and struggle in which God and Satan clash. A closer reading revealed that this corpus of sermons could be divided into three categories:

¹² Cf. *Johan Cilliers*, Disabling God in an able world? Analysis of a South African sermon, in: Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif (NGTT) 2012; 53 (1): 1–12.

3.2.1 Euphoria ...

A number of sermons consider the new situation with optimism, almost euphorically. In these sermons the preacher tries to articulate the political responsibility of believers in the historically tense situation. In some sermons one can find almost the entire rhetoric of election education, sprinkled with a dose of religiosity: the moral obligation to cast your vote, to do so in secret before God, to act as responsible citizen, etc. A simplified exemplary application between Biblical texts and current situations, so popular in nationalist preaching, is also used here to legitimize the political process and ideals.¹³ The foci of many biblical texts are uncritically brought to bear on the national need for reconciliation and unity.

In the process, many theological shifts take place. The new humanness that Christ has wrought in the church as his body is equalized with the achievement of national unity. Using the notion of *imitatio Christi*, one sermon even incites the congregation to protest against injustice and division in the party-political arena. With the help of biblical analogies, new, albeit hidden, God-with-us images become visible again: God becomes the Liberator who makes our slogans come true; God becomes a Candidate in the election and fights for human dignity, etc.¹⁴ In these sermons church and society slot into one another uncritically as the new state becomes representative of the new humanness in Christ – the antithesis disappears completely.

In these sermons there is a tendency to spout beautiful theological truths about God, but one could ask whether the effect is not that God is manipulated into being a principle of piety or a program for freedom of democracy etc. In most of these sermons a religious person that has the potential to live, to choose, to reign in the right way is presupposed. These religious persons' – or voters' – commitment to or utilization of the historical situation of the election makes God's work effective. *Here we find no trace of confession of guilt for the wrong-doings of the past at all. The road to the new "justice for all" does not go via confession of guilt for the injustices of the past, but is mediated through a type of conversion programme.* This conversion is not based on a fundamental consciousness of guilt in terms of the "old regime"; nor admittance of any involvement with or responsibility for it. The future is left in the hands of believers who can live differently from what they did in the past, without admitting *how* they lived in the past.

3.2.2 Reservations ...

The largest number of sermons fall into an interesting middle group in which the situation is seen, at the surface, as "the most important transition in 300 years," a transition that can bring "new

¹³ Cf. idem, *God for Us? An Analysis and Assessment of Dutch Reformed Preaching during the Apartheid Years*, Stellenbosch 2006, 15–40.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 77–83.

hope and new life for all.” Superficially everything seems very positive and the church has the important job of generating courage, hope, and a vision for the future. The transition is seemingly an opportunity for new relationships, values, and responsible actions that can contribute to a new society in which hope for the future is born. But with a closer reading the description of a situation “that could include good things” reveals an undertone of fear of things that could go wrong. Therefore worry, uncertainty, misery surrounds us, and even more: “something big has been lost.” Alongside the apparent positive spirit lies an undertone of melancholy, lurks the possibility of chaos and violence that lead to the “darkest mood” of hopelessness. The church is actually in a crisis situation, in a raging rapid that can lead to disaster. Therefore the church must search for God’s will in order to live in a difficult situation, filled with (apocalyptic) threats, and especially how to still be witnesses for Christ in an undesirable situation.

On deeper levels, these sermons express serious reservations about the “new South Africa.” By implication, they consider the new dispensation as a forced situation that has overwhelmed believers much like fate, to which they need to adapt and of which they need to make the best. But for this they have the necessary religious resources; here, also, listeners can cross the historic watershed without confession of guilt as the basis for real renewal and change. The call to conversion and witness is mostly a call to a type of domesticated and civilized piety, to general religiosity and morality. Believers are piously called upon to simply pray and trust in the Lord to ensure the future.

It is interesting to note the manner in which the biblical texts are utilized to describe the contemporary situation. It is implied that the church today, as in the time of these texts, is living in an apocalyptic dispensation; that the text is also a letter to us as we are “living in the last days,” a life of possible persecution by strange religions and even a heathen government! Here, too, Biblical situations are seen as a mirror of our circumstances through analogy. Through this method of analogy and insinuation the sermons create the space for underlying negative and morose feelings that many congregants surely did experience during the time of transition. It is, however, well hidden behind a positive overtone that only seems to encourage listeners to try and adapt to the new situation.

One could wonder whether such *indirect insinuation* in the use of Scripture is not much more dangerous than the overt exemplary method described above. This method reveals a kind of *homiletic sub consciousness* that can lie hidden in the sermons, in the hearts of preachers and congregants, and act as a filter in the listening process. Such preaching in fact does not lead to transformative thinking and behavior or to institutions preparing themselves for a new situation, but to a regressive blockage – because existing negative feelings find a religious handhold in them.

It justifies a kind of distrust towards the new situation instead of a positive acceptance of responsibility, of ownership.

In these sermons, certain ambivalences are visible in their views of God and society. The indicative of God's salvation is underlined. Christ is offered as the only solution. But this is done to such an extent that one can almost say the sermons dump the entire responsibility for changing the society on God in a deterministic sense. Believers must simply search for God's will and then trust in God. The rhetoric of conditional sentences is used extensively: the church will survive if it is obedient; the future is beautiful if people make the right choices, etc. The new society in these sermons is basically dangerous; ugly things can happen. Therefore the sermons survey the situation with suspicion and even distrust, or at least with reservation.

3.2.3 A new vision for the future ...

A number of sermons demonstrate a strong awareness of the potential of the historic moment and want to facilitate and empower listeners to a new vision for the future. Through the text of the sermon the social reality is read from God's surprising perspective. This perspective generates hope for an alternative situation. The ambivalent situation is sketched as reality, of forces at play that bring both hope and uncertainty. Especially in this ambivalent situation, the promise and indicative of the text is heard, the cosmic victory of God in Christ over evil is proclaimed in the sermon and celebrated in the liturgy. Fate and the overwhelming forces of evil are actually – according to these sermons - illusions. God has already triumphed and through this victory we dream of God's new alternative of peace, reconciliation and justice. This dream invites the congregation to actively and responsibly help to build a new societal culture, new values, and a new public ethos in which we strive for human dignity, justice, and reconciliation. Then not only political dreams come true, but God's comprehensive dream becomes a reality. Most of the sermons in this group simply strive to articulate this new faith, vision and hope.

The sermons in this group have a robust God-image: in God's mercy, God breaks open the apparently closed reality of anxiety, inability, and vulnerability of believers. It is true that believers live in a situation in which both God and evil forces operate, and in which hope and trust, but also danger, frustration, and uncertainty are generated. But God intervenes in our life of *cul de sacs*, and the church becomes a space, created by God, in which the old patterns of injustice are replaced by God's alternative possibilities and realities of justice. The sermons are seen as a means through which the new society could be inaugurated from the future and the congregation as a space in which this new society could be manifested.

4. Just Preaching: Judgement, Pathos, and New Beginnings

One sermon in particular from this last mentioned group caught the eye of the research team. It was moving, not only in proclaiming the vision of a new dispensation, but somehow also initiating and celebrating this dispensation. In it the congregation literally enters the new situation and leaves the old behind, filled with hope.

The preacher? Archbishop Desmond Tutu, preaching a historical sermon in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town only three days before the first democratic elections were held in South Africa, on the 27th of April, 1994. He takes his cue from Psalm 77:14 (*You are a God that works wonders*), and speaks about "The God of surprises, the God who lets miracles unfold before our eyes."¹⁵ In this sermon, fear and reservation are substituted by joy, by amazement – Tutu starts his sermon, characteristically, with a *Wow!* and ends with a *Hey!*

Here we hear no denial, or masking of the past, like in many of the sermons referred to above, when Tutu declares:

"We are all wounded people, traumatized, all of us, by the evil of apartheid."¹⁶

We are again reminded of Walter Brueggemann's description of "just preaching" which entails "[...] that witness to the terrific loss that comes on the community, what in prophetic parlance is *judgment*, but judgment communicated with more sadness than rage." Tutu speaks openly of the wounds, trauma, and evil of the past, but his judgement is characterized by tones of sadness. Quite striking is his *inclusive language* – preaching over the radio to a wider public, probably comprised of perpetrators and victims alike of the evil of apartheid – using words and phrases like "we...all of us" throughout his whole sermon. Indeed, "it is clear that some of the most effective 'prophetic preaching' in our time by such dazzling voices as Desmond Tutu [...] has the power of indignation, but comes across as utterances of hope-filled, compassionate truth-telling largely free of rage."¹⁷ One could say that the hallmark of Desmond Tutu's preaching always was, and still is, inclusivity. In this case, his sermon proclaims *inclusive judgement*, beginning with himself.

But Tutu's sermon does not end here, does not articulate sorrowful and inclusive judgement alone. He speaks passionately of God's pathos for human beings, irrespective of who they are, or where, particularly in the South African context – God's pathos as demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus. In Tutu's own words:

¹⁵ *Desmond Tutu*, *The Rainbow People of God: the making of a peaceful revolution*, ed. John Allen, New York 1994, 261.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁷ *Brueggemann* (note 4), 73.

“The Cross is God’s mark of the depth of his love for us, for you, for me [...] You are very special to God. You are of infinite worth to God [...] Each one of us is of infinite worth because God loves each one of us, black and white, with his infinite, everlasting love.”¹⁸

This again links to Brueggemann’s understanding of just preaching, as acts “[...] that testify to the *pathos* of God, to the pathologies of human community that contribute directly to God’s own pain, a pain that reaches an extremity on the cross.” Throughout the sermon, Tutu emphasises the inclusivity of God’s pathos, for “[...] you and I, all of us, black and white.”¹⁹ Again, we are struck by the inclusivity of his approach; in effect, depicting the *inclusive pathos of God* against the exclusivity that characterized South African society under Apartheid for so long. Time, after time, we hear in his sermons: “All of us, Black and White together, shall overcome, nay, indeed have already overcome.”²⁰

But, also here, Tutu’s sermon does not end. He opens up new visions of hope for the future, more than that, he also calls upon his listeners, to act upon this gift of justice that has been given to South Africa, a justice that now needs concrete embodiment. He states:

“There is life after April 28. [...] We all need healing and we, the Church of God, must pour balm on the wounds inflicted by this evil system. Let us be channels of love, of peace, of justice, of reconciliation. Let us declare that we have been made for togetherness, we have been made for family, that, yes, now we are free, all of us, black and white together, we, the Rainbow People of God!”²¹

This again echoes Brueggemann’s vision of just sermons, “[...] that find around the edges of failure *new beginnings*, new social possibilities that are given here and there in the midst of the deathliness as the prophets watch for and discern signs of newness.” Tutu’s sermon invites the future into the present, by way of speaking, as the *novum* of God’s in-breaking advent. In this sermon, which could be called eschatological in nature, the (present) time is taken forward, toward the future. Or better: it is interpreted in such a manner that the future is brought backward toward the present, i.e. is discovered, as already being in the present.

The God-image in this sermon is of One that surprises, that is not fixated in any pattern, but free to unfold the future in unthought-of ways. In a masterful rhetorical manner, Tutu repeats the words “No” and “Yes” throughout his sermon, using them as codes for judgement and hope; for

¹⁸ Tutu (note 15), 261f.

¹⁹ Ibid., 261.

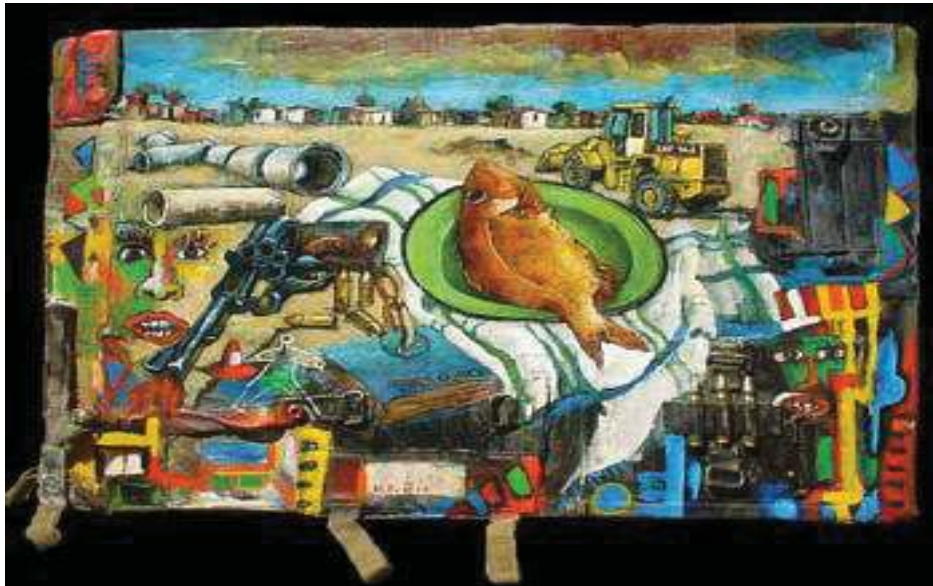
²⁰ From a sermon preached at the funeral of Steve Biko, one of the most influential and gifted black leaders during the time of apartheid; he was murdered while in police custody. *Desmond Tutu, Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches*, Skotaville 1983, 15.

²¹ Tutu (note 15), 262.

facing the past (“We are all wounded people, traumatized, all of us, by the evil of apartheid.”), as well as the future (“There is life after April 28.”). For Tutu, justice is not a nebulous concept, but a reality that must and can be concretized within the community, which he describes as “We, the Church of God ... family ... all of us, black and white together, we, the Rainbow People of God!” He repeatedly asks: “Can we go on like in the past? ‘No!’” And in contrast to that: “Do we have a future? ‘Yes!’”

Tutu imagines, no, rather *inclusively re-imagines* a new society, built on the justice of God’s alternative. In the words of Patrick Miller, Tutu’s sermon is filled “with imagining a different way, with envisioning and announcing the new possibility of God’s way in the world [...]”²² This is a vision in which there is no silence about the injustices of the past, also no false euphoria, but also no reservation; rather re-imagination of an alternative where justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.²³ But all of this is done in view of inclusion, of community, of the “Rainbow People of God”.

Perhaps this hopeful vision of new beginnings could be illustrated by means of an artwork by South African artist, Willie Bester, considered to be one of South Africa’s most important resistance artists. He incorporates recycled material in his paintings, compositions, collages and sculptures. He especially comments on human rights issues and political injustice.²⁴



²² Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “The Prophet’s Sons and Daughters” Amos 7:10–17; Acts 3:17–26. Just Preaching. Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice, ed. André Resner, Jr., St. Louis, Missouri 2003, 80. It would seem that the notion of *imagination*, as being part and parcel of the prophetic tradition, runs throughout almost all descriptions of prophetic preaching, cf. the classic work by Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia 1978, 33ff.

²³ Cf. Amos 5:24.

²⁴ Willie Bester was born in 1956 in Montagu, Western Cape, and currently lives in Kuilsriver. The media he uses are mostly everyday objects: pieces of steel, paper, etc – because he was initially too poor to buy artist’s material.

His colorful painting *Township Plight*²⁵ is full of levels of meaning. At one level, it depicts the realities of the squatter camp, the fragile housing structures, the culture of violence (the gun with bullets), the bulldozer that can demolish houses, a tin with gasoline that can ignite fires, faces reflecting fear, etc. But central to the painting is also a fish – sign of food – and also an ancient Christian symbol of peace and life. There is a cloth – does it portray homeliness and warm humanity? And there is a book. Is it the Bible? Is it in chains? The painting portrays the destructive effect, the heritage of Apartheid, but also the triumph of the human spirit, the (colorful) transcendence of the raw realities of the South African history of Apartheid.

Is this not a vision of new beginnings, in the midst of human struggle? Not unlike Desmond Tutu's sermon?

Just preaching? No, *just* preaching.

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²⁵ Source: www.williebester.co.za; used with permission of the artist.